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Use of Social Media as a Tool to Identify Symptom Needs in Children with Autism

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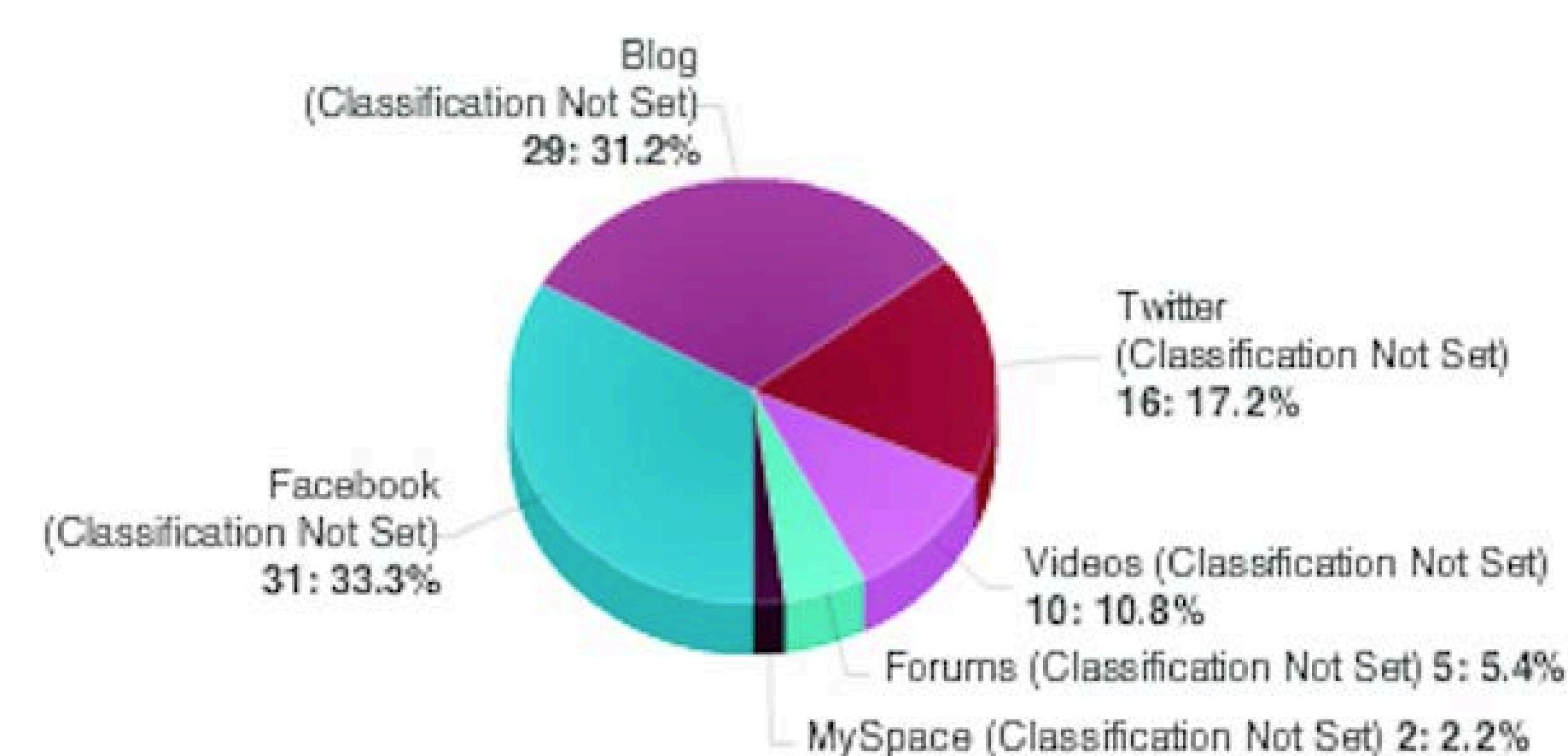
Introduction

- Autism is a unique disease that now affects 1 in every 68 children in the United States (“Prevalence of Autism,” 2014)
- Research have shown that gastrointestinal symptoms have been experienced by a majority of children with Autism (Horvath, K., & Perman, J. (2002). Autism And Gastrointestinal Symptoms. Current Gastroenterology Reports, 251-258.)
- With the growing number of children diagnosed with Autism it is essential in treatment of these children to find new techniques in communicating with parents of children with Autism, as well as obtaining information from them.
- Because of the increased use of social media in today’s world, access to information about Autism and individuals diagnosed with Autism has become more easily assessable.

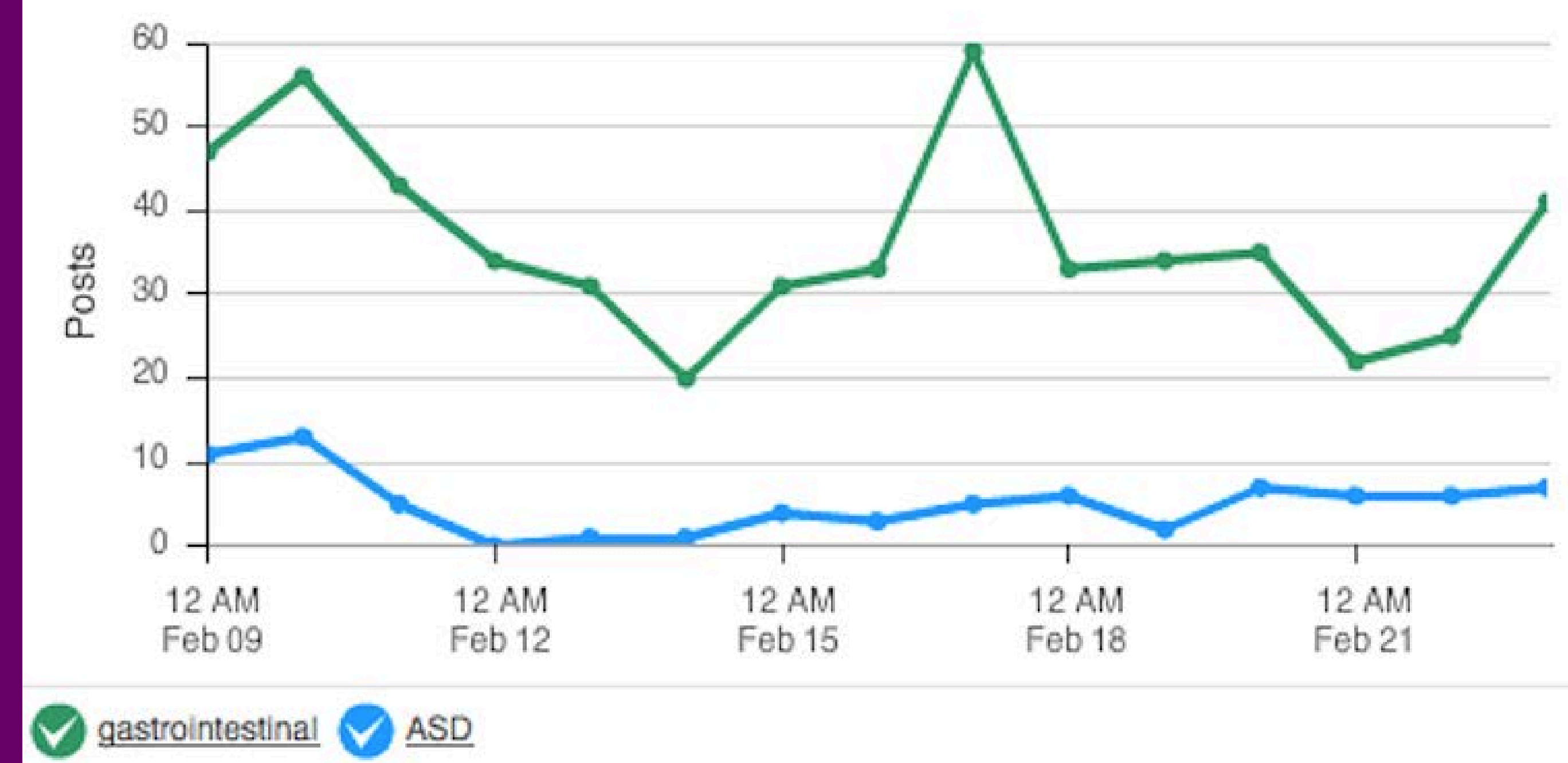
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and gastrointestinal symptoms.

Graph of Number of Post from Each Social Media Type



Graph of # of Posts Per Day



Results

- 75 posts contain a link between gastrointestinal symptoms and ASD
- 500 posts contain the word gastrointestinal
- 77 posts contain the word ASD
- 500 posts contain the word Autism
- 12 of the 544 posts do not have Autism or ASD found anywhere in the article, post, tweet, or blog
- 32 of the 544 posts are unavailable so it is impossible to determine what has been said.
- 544 posts total analysed

Methods

- Data were gathered from Radian 6 over the span of 2 weeks in February. Radian 6 allows all types of social media including Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Videos, etc. to come together in one place. Radian 6 allows the researcher to download the posts so that they can be organized.
- Data were then organized based on the topic, what type of social media was used, and its relevance to Autism and gastrointestinal symptoms.
- Radian 6 was then used to display data in different widgets (chart-making apps that are included on Radian 6) to show how the data could be observed and what is on the forefront of individual’s with Autism, their families, and providers minds.

Review of Literature

- Caregivers, parents, and individuals with Autism often use social media to share information and to reach out to others who have Autism or know someone who has Autism (Schrock, 2009).
- Limited research has been done on individuals with Autism and gastrointestinal disorders and the affect social media has on the individuals (Buie, et. al, 2010; Horvath and Perlman, 2002).
- However, research has been done on different types of social media that individuals with Autism prefer to us. Blogs were the most common type of social media used by individuals with Autism. (Newton, et. al, 2009).
- Research has also been done to determine factors associated with diagnosis. Understanding factors that affect age of diagnosis and why children with Autism interact the way they do helps researchers better understand the needs of caregivers and individuals with Autism to use social media.(Mandell, Novak, & Zubritsky, 2005)

Word Cloud



Conclusion

Over a two week time span 544 posts were found to be written be parents, caregivers, providers, or individuals with ASD. Symptoms often associated with ASD were found in 500 of the posts. Gastrointestinal symptoms, sleep disturbances, and intellectual disabilities were the common symptoms discussed in children with ASD. Several of the posts found were discussion forums between parents of children with Autism who were asking questions about symptoms and if they had seen these same symptoms in their children. Several of the posts asked if any other parents had tried different diets to alleviate some of the gastrointestinal symptoms. The research team would like to gain a better understanding as to why parents turn to social media to receive information about their child’s symptoms.

Of note, when collecting data, it was found that because the recent research on giving the MMR vaccine and the possibility that it causes Autism was proved fraudulent, this was a very common topic of discussion and could have skewed the data away from other topic important to parents of children with Autism.

Acknowledgements

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